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UNCLAS KATHMANDU 000379

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR SA/INS AND DS/OP/NEA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [NE](#)

SUBJECT: REVISED CASUALTY ESTIMATES FOR ACHHAM AS  
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE ON EMERGENCY STALLS

REF(S): (A) KATHMANDU 0377; (B) KATHMANDU 0333

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SUMMARY  
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1. (SBU) Revised casualty estimates for the Maoists' Feb. 17 attacks on an airport and district headquarters in Achham indicate that nearly 130 were killed, most of them security forces. Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba was expected to address Parliament the morning of Feb. 18, beginning debate on the ratification of the state of national emergency declared Nov. 26. The session was temporarily suspended, however, after Opposition MPs interrupted the Home Minister's report on the Achham incident. End summary.

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CIVILIAN CASUALTIES REVISED DOWNWARD  
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2. (U) Initial civilian casualty estimates for the deadly Feb. 17 attacks on the airport, district headquarters, police station, and Royal Nepal Army (RNA) barracks in Achham in western Nepal (Ref A) have been revised sharply downward. Information to date indicates that only five civilians--the Chief District Officer, the local head of the National Investigation Department and his wife, the postmaster, and a photographer--were killed in the midnight assault on the district headquarters. The number of RNA killed stands at 48, including a captain and a lieutenant, while the number of police casualties is estimated at 76 (49 at the police station in Mangalsen and 27 at the airport). (Note: Ministry of Defense tallies do not include the police casualties at the airport. End note.) Casualty figures for the Maoists are unavailable, although the RNA has reported finding only three bodies of suspected Maoists at Mangalsen.

3. (U) Besides attacking the District Administration Office, prison, army barracks, and police station and robbing a bank at Mangalsen, the insurgents also set fire to the post office, the tax office, forestry and livestock offices, and the Nepal Telecommunications Office. Communications to the district have been cut off since 3:00 a.m. Feb. 17.

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PARLIAMENTARY SESSION SUSPENDED  
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4. (SBU) PM Deuba was expected to address Parliament at 11:00 a.m. on Feb. 18 at a session originally scheduled for debate on ratification of the three-month-old state of emergency (Ref B). However, when Home Minister Khum Bahadur Khadka rose first to report on the Achham incidents, he was immediately shouted down by Opposition MPs clamoring for the PM to address the session instead. Parliament was suspended after 45 minutes of chaos (including, by some accounts, benches being tossed around), until 3:00 p.m. As of 4:00 p.m., however, the session had not resumed, with the Government of Nepal (GON) apparently resisting Opposition pressure to have the PM, rather than the Home Minister, speak about the bloody attacks. The session may resume after 5:00 p.m.

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COMMENT  
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5. (SBU) Even with the revised casualty numbers, the attacks in Achham still stand as the bloodiest in the six years of the Maoist insurgency. If the Maoists meant to put pressure on Deuba just as debate on the emergency was set to resume, they seem to have succeeded. That Nepal's Parliamentarians could not overcome their personal political rivalries long enough to allow serious, reasoned debate of this national emergency is disturbing, but not surprising. If the squabbling in Parliament succeeds in postponing debate

on the emergency much longer, the Maoists will have won yet another victory--but this time without having to fire a single shot.

Malinowski